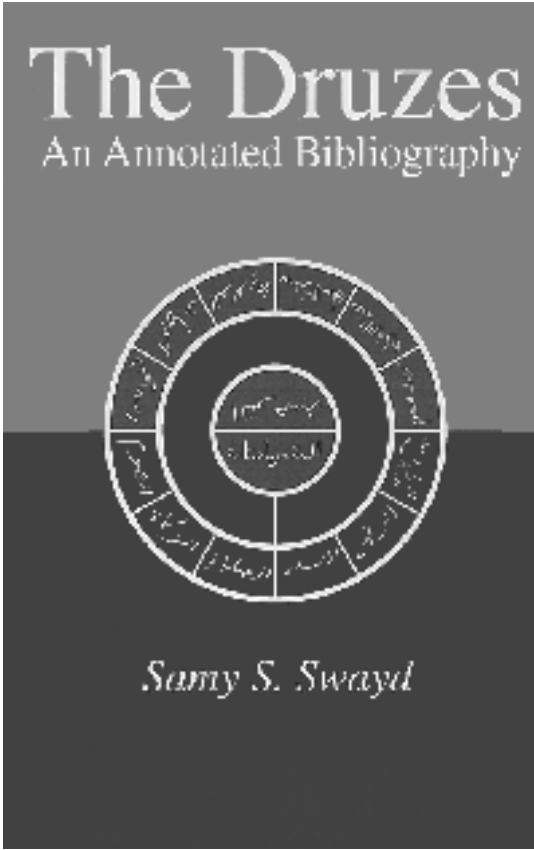


IDS
SAMY S. SWAYD

The Druzes are a Middle Eastern minority group with their formal origins in 11th century Fatimid Cairo, where they began as a reform movement within the esoteric Ismaili tradition during the caliphate of al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah (r. 996–1021). The Druze doctrine contains specific moral lessons and rules of individual and communal conduct that are embodied in approximately 30 manuscripts, some of which have been lost. Political and religious power were normally separated within the Druze communities, the religious specialists forming a class of initiates in the esoteric principles. In contrast to related religious groups, women were traditionally initiated.



The Institute of Druze Studies

Today, there are nearly one million Druzes living in mountainous regions in Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, smaller Druze immigrant communities established themselves elsewhere around the world and can be found in Australia, Canada, Europe, the Philippines, South and Central America, the United States, and West Africa. Since World War II, small communities can also be found in the Gulf States. In order to preserve their traditions and maintain frequent contact with their co-religionists, they have formed associations, organized conventions, and published pamphlets and newsletters. In the United States, for example, the American Druze Society (ADS) has convened annual gatherings since 1946 and, more recently, established a main cultural centre in Eagle Rock, California. Other established immigrant Druze societies include the British Druze Society (BDS), the Canadian Druze Society (CDS), and the Sydney Druze Society (SDS) in Australia. The Druzes are generally one of the most understudied Middle Eastern minorities and Islamic sects. Due to the ubiquitous misconceptions of the Druzes in both medieval and especially in 18th and 19th-century literature, the Institute of Druze Studies (IDS) was established.

The IDS was founded in early 1998 as an international academic research institute and then, in September of that year, was incorporated as a non-profit organization of the state of California. The IDS board of directors consists of more than 20 members from seven countries and 15 universities. The Institute aims to (1) provide information

on Druze history, society, and faith, (2) encourage research and studies on historical and contemporary Druze communities and (3) promote academic discourse and other public forums about Druze-related topics.

The IDS will pursue these objectives through an international annual conference, a publication series, and a newsletter. The annual conference will bring together senior and junior scholars who are working on Druze-related topics. In collaboration with the G.E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the Institute's first International Conference will take place at UCLA Faculty Center on June 11-12, 1999. The theme of the conference is: The Druzes: 1000 Years of History, Reform, and Tradition. More than 20 scholars from 15 universities and other research institutions are participating in the conference. Conference panels include the following themes: Deconstructing 11th Century Cairo; History and Historiography: Perceptions and Misconceptions; Cosmology and Theology; Identity and Community; and Identity, Solidarity, and Nationality. The conference proceedings will be published subsequently as the third volume in the Institute's publication series.

The first book in the IDS publication series was published in May 1998 by Samy S. Swayd who is the founder of the IDS. The book is titled: *The Druzes: An Annotated Bibliography* (Kirkland, WA: ISES Publications, xx+199pp.). In addition to a bibliography of 328 books and 427 articles, a chronology, glossary, selected translations, maps, genealogical tables, and plates, this book in-

cludes a concise 50-page introduction to Druze society, history, and faith. The second book in the IDS publication series by the same author, *The Druze Scriptures: Exoteric and Esoteric Hermeneutics*, will be published in late summer 1999. It examines the study of Druze scriptures and includes annotations of more than 80 Druze manuscripts, and provides a compendium of Druze beliefs and practices.

The newsletter, which is scheduled to be published tri-annually beginning this summer, will provide updates about published works and public talks, as well as research reports on Druze villages and towns, prominent families and individuals, and other activities and programmes that are relevant to the Druzes. ♦

The IDS encourages submissions of book manuscripts for consideration in the Institute's publication series. It also encourages articles or research reports for inclusion in the newsletter. IDS Internet: www.idspublications.com

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